

# Christ and Culture

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Date: 24 April 2018

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[ 0 : 00 ] What happens when two cultures collide? How do they work out how to live together? Now, remember what I said about cultures, that they're actually repositories of deeply held beliefs and values, which means if you want to change culture successfully, you have to actually do it at the level of the beliefs and values, not just behaviorally.

If you just do it behaviorally or impose it on other people, it's superficial at best, and it also builds resentment and resistance. And when a society such as Australia has a long corporate history, and Chinese as well, these beliefs and values are actually very hard to change quickly.

The power of that story that I talked about to transmit culture also has that same power to bind people together and to bind that narrative and bind people to that narrative.

Now, if you look at your booklet, what I want to do now is just consider four ways in which, and these are generalizations again, and there are probably nuances within each, but there are four general ways in which people or cultures, options for which they integrate, options for integration between two cultures.

Okay, and actually they have some overlap with the Australian stories that I talked about, the four, because if you think about how the four stories play out, there is actually, you'll see some of the ways these sorts of integration has been tried and what's happened with it.

[ 1 : 35 ] So let's look at them briefly. The first way of bringing two cultures together is annihilation. Okay, it doesn't sound like it's bringing anything together, but it's annihilation. And that's when a stronger culture exterminates a weaker culture.

Okay, very drastic. And often it's through genocide. There's no attempt to try and understand the other, no allowances given for allowing the weaker culture to come in and survive.

So early on with Australian white settlement, and I'm not saying this is widespread, but there was sporadic killing of indigenous people. So that is a form of annihilation.

The stronger culture in a struggle for the control of land and resources kills off the weaker. And if you look at the US and Canada and South America, wherever there's been colonization, some of that may have happened as well.

So that's briefly all I'm going to say about that. The second way is that of assimilation, and that's probably a more prevalent way. And that's when those in a weaker culture are forced to assimilate into the strongest culture to survive.

[ 2 : 45 ] Again, there's no concession to the weaker culture, that is to accommodate to what the weaker culture might want. It's more become like us, or we wouldn't accept you. So again, in the early days, for example, with the gold rush, the Chinese were sort of treated as outsiders.

They looked different. They had different dress. And they had to assimilate. And so you've got pictures. I think I've got another picture of a slide of a picture of a Chinese person in a Western suit. Have I got that? Yeah. So, it looks like us now, right? No different. But in the 1880s...

Sorry, who does it look like, Jackie? No. In the 1880s, this would look out of place, right? They have a lot of people still in pigtailed and the traditional Chinese dress.

And then you get some of these Chinese trying to assimilate. Now, these are surface changes, right? It's not at the deeper cultural beliefs and values level.

[ 3 : 48 ] That took a longer time to change. And some of that did happen. But what went on side by side with the second way is the third way. An attempt by the weaker culture to retain their beliefs and values whilst trying to assimilate or blend in.

I couldn't really come up with the term for it. So, I've called it subversion. And that's to privately or covertly hang on to their culture while at the same time adopting some of the ways of the dominant culture.

And for us, like Chinese, you know, it's things like continuing to practice the cultural festivals that we have or even the religious festivals and practicing things like arranged marriages and all that. Now, nowadays, Australian society has embraced Chinese culture, right? You can't, you know, Chinese New Year is everybody's sort of kind of celebration. You see it on TV and everything. And that, you know, that's really great.

Part of it, I think, is just because the Chinese have spending power. Politicians know they have votes. And so, they're assiduously, you know, courting them. Our local member has this Chinese New Year due that we get invited to at some used car salesman's sort of showroom to celebrate Chinese New Year.

[ 5 : 06 ] And we always get the invite and we never go. It's free drinks and everything, free food and drinks. But a similar thing is happening, too, with, I think, now, Muslims or Islamic Sharia law.

So, last week on radio, I heard that for Muslim women to be divorced, they want to get a divorce, they actually need to get it both under Australian law, but they also have to apply under Sharia law to be divorced so that they will be seen as divorced in their community.

And so, they have to apply to a council of imams to do that. And then, obviously, there are issues around that because sometimes they get divorced under Australian law but not under religious law.

So, this is a sort of practice of subversion, keeping the culture going, even while on the open or whatever, on the surface, they are assimilating into the dominant culture.

And so, I think what's happened is that we've now seen, particularly in the West, a sort of reaction to some of these practices of the past, of annihilation or assimilation, the thing that I said, you know, white guilt and stuff like that.

[ 6 : 11 ] There's been regret and shame about what's happened. And so, what they've now strongly pushed is the fourth way, that of coexistence and amalgamation.

Okay, more coexistence. It's the sort of standard approach, I think, nowadays in pluralistic society.

So, the assumption is that there is no right or wrong with any culture.

Everything is valid. And provided you don't hurt somebody else, people must be allowed to practice whatever they want. And so, as a society, diversity is the ultimate value to be preserved or celebrated.

So, now it's wrong to criticize any culture except the Judeo-Christian culture. And the reason for that, I think, is that because that's the very culture that led to annihilation and assimilation in the first place.

And Judeo-Christian culture is a culture which actually insists that there is right and wrong. By the way, Islam does as well, but I think a lot of people haven't cottoned on to that as yet.

[ 7 : 16 ] But remember what I said in the first talk, that it's one thing to accept diversity in race, which people can't change, but it's another thing to be uncritical of culture or, for that matter, religion, because culture is something you can change.

You can choose to adopt or reject, including the beliefs and values that underlie it. And so, I think we will start, and I think we're really starting to see some of the problems with this fourth way of unreflective coexistence and amalgamation.

Coexistence is fine if there are common beliefs and values. Some of the differences you have on the edges, yeah, we'll live and let live.

But if there is a fundamental clash in the belief systems, I don't think you can just simply say, let's just coexist. Because once you start working out what the rules are for living together, for making laws, how are we going to live by one set of rules, then it's actually necessary to decide which belief system, which values you consider to be right or wrong.

Or at least, at the very least, consider which one is better than the other. So, it's not just about saying, oh yeah, whatever goes, as long as we tolerate each other. And as I already said before, this is not a dispassionate kind of exercise, is it?

[ 8 : 45 ] Because we all bring to our, you know, bring to this exercise our personal story, which is tied up with culture. And if you're asking me to say, okay, I need to relinquish some aspect of my culture in order for us to live together, then for some people, that amounts to having to deny their own identity or reject their own history or story.

And, you know, I think that's in part what's going on with this whole debate around changing the date for Australia Day. Because if we were to change the date, that actually threatens the validity of the establishment story.

All the achievements of white settlement, will be invalidated, I think. Or people would think so. And the success of this country, it's somehow made illegitimate by changing the date.

Because you're no longer saying that this is the date on which we started to make progress in this society. We're saying, this is the date on which one people invaded another people.

It changes the whole narrative, doesn't it? So, it's not so simple as to just, say, change the date.

Now, of course, on the other hand, if you don't change the date, then the indigenous story, again, seems to be sidelined and silenced, doesn't it?

[10:07] All the wrongs and injustice and dispossessions they've experienced is tied up with this one date. That was the date on which they started to be, you know, exterminated, exterminated, pushed out of their land and treated, not as human beings, but as people of, you know, lesser value.

So, it's problematic, isn't it? It's not easy. I mean, I don't know how it's going to pan out. But I don't, you know, short of the gospel, I'm not sure how, I'm not sure how this, our country is going to actually move through this.

That's why I think this fourth approach of coexistence sounds nice in theory, you know, love and tolerance should prevail, but actually, it's challenging. It's been particularly challenging when there's been history in the past that needs to be worked through.

And it doesn't work without all parties really thinking long and hard, not just from their own perspective, but from the other's perspective, and then learning how to resolve these things in an attitude of grace and forgiveness and respect, which is not easy, given where the temperature is at the moment with the country.

Which I think brings me to the fifth approach, which is not on the page numbered as such, but it's actually really the whole gist of this talk. And that is, the fifth approach is the way of Christ.

[11:35] It's us, how we bring to the discussion about culture's meeting the values of the Bible, the beliefs of the Bible, and what has happened to us in Christ Jesus.

And what's happened to us is that when we're in Christ Jesus, that is when we believe in Him, and we become a member of God's kingdom, what it does, it changes fundamentally how we look at our own culture and our own stories.

We're going to look at this over two sessions. In this one, I just want to consider how knowing Christ changes we look at our own culture as individuals and then allows us to interact and live with the culture around us and cultures that are not part of us.

That's the first question if you're trying to follow it from the introduction of the booklet. And then later on, after lunch or after the afternoon free time, we'll consider how being in Christ helps us to live together, that is, as a church, even when we come from diverse cultures.

Okay, so as Harry said, one's an I question and the other one's a we question. And the issue is that although we may be Christians, there is still a human tendency for us to adopt one of these four approaches that I've got on the screen.

[12:57] And so what we want to try and do is look at the Bible to see how it teaches us to live in a different way, a radically different way, a different way to how we're normally used to. All right, let's look at the first one which is on Christ and culture and as it pertains to us as individuals because God has done an amazing thing when we become Christians.

We think we've believed in Jesus and we're on the way to heaven but much more is happening than just that. And to do that we're going to open the Bible to chapter 3 of Galatians so if you can do that and I'll come and ask Devin to come and read it for us.

Galatians chapter 3 verse 26 and he's going to read it to verse 7 of chapter 4. Thanks Devin. So in Christ you are all children of God through faith for all of you were baptized into Christ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Gentile neither slave nor free nor is there male or female for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.

What I am saying is that as long as you are as an heir is underage he is no different from a slave although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.

[14:30] So also when we were underage we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. But when the set time had fully come God sent his son born of a woman born under the law to redeem those under the law that we might receive adoption to sonship because you are

his sons.

God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts the spirit who calls out Abba Father. So you are no longer a slave but God's child and since you are his child God has made you also an heir. Okay, if you can just leave that open for a minute because the thing to understand with the context here is that this letter to Galatians in this letter Paul has been affirming the unifying power of the gospel.

Remember earlier in the letter he rebuked Peter for not wanting to eat with Gentiles and then later on he's criticized the Jews who made the Gentiles obey the law as a basis for fellowship.

And for Paul this is all rubbish because as you know he says we are saved by faith in Jesus. We are saved by grace by faith through grace not by observing any law or doing this or that.

[ 15 : 52 ] But now as we get to this passage Paul says that because we are in Christ we share a common identity so that he can say that all who are in Christ whether we are Jew or Greek free or slave male or female we are all sons of God and children by faith we are no longer slaves to sin.

So as you've got in the outline we have gone from slaves to sons and from sinners to saints in Christ holy before God. And so this is an amazing change to our identity and so even though we do not lose our ethnic identity or even our social status or whether we are male or female yet this common identity that we have is now our primary identity as a person.

All that stuff that you put in those boxes the one that is primary is being in Christ or as Harry had Jesus with the cross with the crown. That is the primary marker of who we are now not the other stuff that we have.

And it's interesting isn't it those of you who are up with this whole fetish concept of intersectionality doesn't make sense don't worry it's not worth worrying about but if you are everything about intersectionality is solved by being in Christ isn't it?

So as brothers and sisters the first thing we are to see in each other shouldn't be our race or our status or gender but it should be this Christian identity that we have you know that sort of bit hard not the first thing that comes across to you when you see someone like that but sons and saints is how we need to think about one another.

[ 17 : 38 ] And the amazing thing about this Christian identity is that unlike race or gender or good looks or family wealth none of which any of us have any control over being in Christ is something we can all choose to be.

By God's grace all it takes is to have faith in Jesus. And this unity that we now have in Christ also has that practical effect then of helping us transcend our racial and cultural differences.

It's not that as I said before these differences disappear but they actually ought not to matter as we relate to each other. and I'll speak more about how it's still relevant but for now what we have to take away is that it becomes our primary identity by which we as a church are to establish culture in our community.

So we shouldn't be asking the question should we be more Asian or more Australian? No we should be asking should we be more Christian? How does the values and beliefs of the Bible shape how we are?

not because there are more Asians we need to be more Asian or we want to reach out to Asians therefore we need to be more Asians. That's not the question. The question is how can we be more Christian in our culture?

[ 19 : 00 ] It's no longer the ethnic culture that prevails. Not my culture, not your culture. It's not even the Australian culture that should be the yardstick but rather God's word not needs to dictate our culture.

Now of course because we're living in Australia our Christian culture will have an Aussie flavor. Okay? And that's fine.

But we're not being dictated to by the Australian culture. And we certainly don't exclude other Christians into our community because somehow they belong to another culture.

And so a mark of Christian maturity comes when we no longer find our security in our ethnic culture but in Christ. And one way to ask that question and you know Declan sort of raised a bit of that is what gives us a greater sense of belonging?

Is it when we're with Christians regardless of what race or social background or whatever other differences there may be as long as we're Christians we have this sense of belonging or is it only when we're with Christians that are like us?

[ 20 : 11 ] Whether it's race, culture, demographics or social economic background. It's very easy isn't it when you're always with Christians of your own type to confuse your comfort with your own culture with your identity in Christ.

And so you know if you find that you're with people that are like you all the time go and hang out with people that are not like you Christians that are not like you and see how that feels and see whether there's Christian belonging.

That's a true test I think. If you can talk to someone who's 85 and still go this is a brother in Christ that I love or is it only someone who's for me 47 this is a brother in Christ is that is that only when I feel that I belong in that community.

Now the other thing too of course apart from identity is that being in Christ also gives us a shared story. Remember how I said stories are powerful? Well we've got a really powerful story with which we all share and it transcends our individual stories and this is the story of the Bible.

So in the next point under B it is the story of going from Eden in Genesis to the New Jerusalem in Revelation. So look again back at Galatians chapter 3 and verse 29 which I've got on the slide.

[ 21 : 32 ] Paul says there that by belonging to Christ we become Abraham's seed and heirs to the promise. In other words everything that God promised Abraham and which was fulfilled through Christ and through Israel is now ours to own.

This Bible story everything that was promised to Abraham is actually our inheritance, our story because of being in Christ. Abraham's story is actually our story more so than the Anzac story, more so than you know whatever your background is from China, whatever the migrant story, that this is now our story and we don't have to be Jews to own this story.

No, the Bible story and all its promises and blessings, all of God's plan, all of that is actually ours in Christ. Now of course, so is the story of Adam, our forefather.

So we own that story as well as people who sinned just as he did but we also own the cure through Jesus, his death for us on the cross.

And by dying for us, Jesus not only brought the Jews back into relationship with him and God, he also did that for all the Gentiles as well.

[ 22 : 49 ] So Paul explains this in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 11 and 13. He says, Therefore, remember that you, that's us who are Gentiles by birth, remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, and foreigners to the government of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

But now, in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. And then he goes on to say in verse 14, For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups, one, that's Jew and Gentile, and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations.

His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity or one new race out of the two, thus making peace and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

And so, there is in Christ now a single race, if you like, the Christian race, united by the blood of Jesus. And regardless of what sort of ethnic race or culture you used to belong to, if you are in Christ, you belong to this new humanity.

And to finish off the story, this new race or humanity is now headed towards a common destiny, that of the new Jerusalem where we will share eternity together in God's presence.

[ 24 : 22 ] And it's interesting, as you read Revelation, even as we head towards this destiny, we will still retain our cultural identity. Because, remember, in Revelation it talks about tribes and tongues and nations gathered around Jesus' throne.

It's not one language and one tribe, we still retain our ethnic culture. So, our individual stories are not erased, our culture is not erased, but we are caught up into a bigger story, a much more powerful and uniting story in Christ.

And so, as Christians, it actually helps us to see our place in the Australian story in new light. Because we are in Christ, even though you may be, let's say, a migrant, you don't have to accomplish material success in order to make it in this society.

That's the narrative of the migrant, isn't it? That may be your original aim or your aim of your parents, but now, being in Christ, you have a greater goal and dream, that of glory in the new Jerusalem, not glory in Australia.

Likewise, you don't have to worry about whether you're Australian enough to be accepted, because your true acceptance is found in Christ. On the other hand, if you're a white Australian, you don't need to fear the changes coming upon you because Australian culture is changing, because again, that is not your primary culture, your final homeland is the new Jerusalem.

[ 25 : 50 ] This is not where you will finally find your homeland. About ten years ago, while we were still at St. Mark's in Camberwell, the vicar at that time, he invited an indigenous pastor from Cape York to come to Melbourne.

And just as now, the topic of reconciliation was a big one. And so after church, when we met him over lunch as a group, he was asked his views on that topic. To which his answer was that, yes, there were many injustices suffered by his people, and yes, if the white people could acknowledge some of that, it would be really good.

But at the end of the day, he said, it wasn't something that consumed him or his church. Why? Because he said that for him, true reconciliation occurred in Christ.

And he was willing to forgive because he himself had been forgiven. For him, so he, there were sort of white Australians there, he didn't have any animosity with them because together they found reconciliation in Christ.

Can you see what's happened with it? The Bible story for him had taken precedence over his indigenous story, and he was willing to relinquish or subordinate that story, you know, the story of dispossession and being victims of injustice, because he was now part of this greater story, that of being an heir to God's promise, which he shares with all his fellow Christians, whether white, black, or brown.

[ 27 : 22 ] And I'm not saying all this so that, you know, we don't do those acts of reconciliation as Christians, you know, say sorry when we have to. But as Christians, we recognize that we're, we've got something much better now.

We've got something much bigger that unites us as Christians. And this something bigger heals even the deepest of human wounds. Things that have divided us in the past.

And so, if you've been a victim of racial abuse, bullying, or whatever, the gospel of Jesus heals all that, because we're heirs of God's promises.

Not because of what we've done, but because of God's grace. We don't need to be stuck in this narrative of being abused or mistreated or whatever. We've got a bigger narrative that says we're, you know, we're blessed in Christ.

And that should make us generous and gracious people. People willing to forgive. People open to the cultures of others. Even of the cultures that have been unkind to us in the past.

[ 28 : 35 ] And if that particular person is a brother or sister in Christ, we have all the more in common with them. And we have all the more common with them, more so than even people who are of the same culture as us, but not a Christian.

Because their deepest goals and desires as a Christian is also our goals. Now, I'm going to talk a bit later about how, yes, even in spite of all that, there will still be differences in culture and we need to work with some of the nuances and all that and spend time with each other to try and understand each other better.

But for now, I want us to actually just be caught up in the fact that we're living out the same big story together as Christians. That's irrespective of our culture and our race.

And we have a common identity, that of being in Christ, which transcends our individual ones of race and culture.